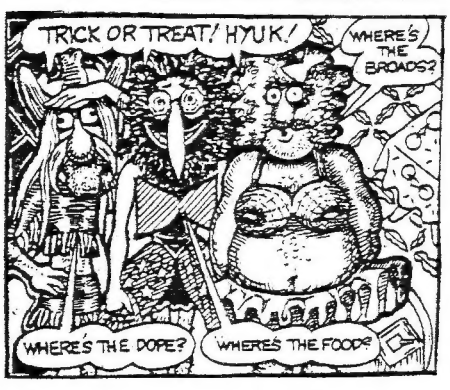
COMIX WORLD 222. July, 1983. © Clay Geerdes, Box 7081, Berkeley, CA 94707. All Rights Reserved. Subs: $11 for two years.* Preview shots from SAN FRANCISCO COMIC BOOK 7. © Bill Griffith, Melinda Gebbie, Bruce Simon, and Roger Brand. Spain's cover has Godzilla invading the Mission District in San Francisco.* Freak Brothers appear in color in RIP OFF COMIX 12, fat and readable for $2.95* Nudity and lesbianism in DC's CAMELOT!* A Charles Burns cover on EL VIBORA 41 ($5 from J. M. Berengueur, Plaza Beatas 3, Barcelona, SPAIN.) and the Freak Brothers on MAKOKI 4 (same address). JUL 30-31, CREATION CON at Hyatt in Oakland.

I TRIED NOT TO GET TOO SELF-CONSCIOUS ABOUT MY EVERY MOVE BEING RECORDED ON VIDEO-TAPE.. I DECIDED TO DO MY ART CARNEY IMITATION.. ..IT ALWAYS WENT OVER BIG..



UNDERGROUND COLLECTING: I've been asked why there is so little participation from underground collectors in all the comic conventions that occur in the U.S. every year. The answer is simple. There aren't that many collectors. They are not central; i.e., they all live in widely different parts of the country. They already know one another and they buy and sell and trade. Why come to a convention? The cons are pretty standardized these days. If you've been to one big one, you know what to expect. You know that most of the action is bought and paid for by the larger companies, that the artists who work for those companies are going to be treated like royalty while the freelancers get the bum's rush. You know that the latest Marvel hacks are going to get awards while underground artists who have dozens of books to their credit are going to be ignored. No? Where is Robert Crumb's Inkpot Award? Larry Todd's? Spain's? Every year it's the same story; the underground artists are expected to come at their own expense. Why the hell should they? Because the majority of the fans come to the cons to see the Marvel hacks, not to see the underground artists. In other words, the conventions are moneymaking organizations and they are not going to invest in artists unless they are a draw. Is that harshly put? I don't think so. If underground people aren't welcome at the conventions, the promoters ought to come right out and say so. Why pussyfoot around? Why this second-class citizenship? Why this backroom table treatment? It is certainly an insult to anyone's intelligence to sit and watch Marvel and DC hacks given awards for that drivel known as the company product line while artists like Crumb who have produced some of the most creative and innovative work of the past two decades go ignored. Someone said to me that Crumb would probably get an award if he went to conventions, but he doesn't go. What kind of bullshit is that? Since when does a major artist have to go to a con to be given his due award? A lot of people don't show up at the Academy for their Oscars. A friend or associate simply picks up the award for them. Fact is, a convention is simply a promotional for the product and unless you are paying the tab, you are not welcome. You learn that in subtle ways. But back to collecting for a moment. The sixties were not a period of retention, of saving up the past; they were a time of movement and travel and exploration, when young people left their collections and went on the road, usually taking only what they could carry in a backpack. These runaway wanderers-cum-hippies read underground newspapers and comix, but they didn't even think about saving them. They passed them along or threw them away or slept under them in the rain, a reason why an issue or two of GOTHIC BLIMPWORKS is rare these days. Only a handful of people even thought of collecting underground comix, and they still have them. A few new collectors came along in the late seventies, but you have to have a lot more people than that to sustain a convention. One or two publishers attend cons, but these promote their latest titles, and do not deal in back issues. The last couple of conventions I attended, Marvel dealers had a couple of boxes of ugs. Their attitude? "Make me an offer and they're yours." -Clay Geerdes
May 17, 1983

C.G.

HERE'S CARTOONIST Roger Brand

COMIC BOOKS. Born of advertising in the early 1930's, comic books were a white middle-class phenomenon. They have changed very little. The artwork is more sophisticated and technological improvements in the printing process have resulted in a slicker product, but the content of comic books continues to reflect the fantasies and prejudices of WASP America and those who aspire to it. This leaves a lot of people out, blacks, Asians, Latinos, Poles, Czechs, Jews, Serbo-Croations, Swedes, Germans; the majority, in fact, of urban America. Since the comic books are partisan, nationalistic, chauvinistic, always beating the drum for an 18th century Americanism, they can hardly deal with the rest of the world on any but a simplistic basis. Superman, child of Hercules, was swiped from Philip Wylie's novel GLADIATOR (1930)by a couple of Jewish high school students. They put a red cape and a pair of panties on him, laid out a story, and went after a market. Superman was a dud. It took six years to get him a spot, the lead in the first issue of ACTION COMICS (1938). Success, under capitalism, is always measured in terms of sales, and success is always widely imitated. So it was with Superman. Captain Marvel got into the action as a parody of Superman. War with Germany and Japan lead to the ascendancy of Captain America and the Golden Age of Timely Comics. During a period when real people were getting bad news telegrams from the government, it was nice to pick up Superman and see a character powerful enough to bend 16 mm howitzers and kick holes in U-boats. Superheroism flourished during the war years and became established as the major comic book theme. Women had joined the labor force at home to replace the men who went to fight in Europe and the forties saw the birth of WONDER WOMAN, PHANTOM LADY, MISS AMERICA, and a number of other superheroines, all white, all aristocratic. Though many black men fought in WWII, they are rarely seen in the war comics. Sergeant Rock was a white cigar-chewing redneck, some comic book writer's idea of masculinity. With a couple of exceptions, like G.I. JANE, women were ignored. Most often, they were seen as cheesecake images, sex objects spaced around a page as scenery.

Among educated people, comic books are still regarded as trash, as a lowbrow form of entertainment, all of them, from the least to the most artistically sophisticated. Today, we speak of those who are "into" comics and the rest of the world. There are professors, chemists, computer science experts, radiologists, psychiatrists, who collect comics--secretly; they do not mention them in their classrooms, nor do they display them in their homes.

The most widely known comic books are those connected with movies. The two media have interrelated for years. Successful as a comic book in the late thirties, SUPERMAN was equally successful as a radio show, serial, and feature films in the forties. In the fifties, he was a hit on television, so much so that George Reeves committed suicide to escape the image. Now, of course, along with STAR WARS, SUPERMAN is destined to be one of the most successful megaserials of all time. Comic book heroes have rarely failed onstage or screen. Strip characters have had equal success. TARZAN, BLONDIE, FLASH GORDON, JOE PALOOKA--all have been onscreen and were well received by adults and kids alike.

When I was a kid, there was a parental prejudice against comic books. Not strips. My Dad and mother read the Sunday funnies religiously. Wouldn't open the cover of a comic book. They would go to the movies and see the same stuff on screen, but I couldn't get a minute's attention from Mom for a great gag in one of Stanley's LITTLE LULU stories.

What I see now in movies, t-v, comic books, is one mega-formula being used over and over. It's not a healthy one, not one which focuses on human endeavor, on positive values, on friendship, love, kindless, thoughtfulness. The robots are the most sympathetic characters in the McDonald's world of STAR WARS. A thief and a mugger is the charismatic hero of BREATHLESS. Who WAS that masked man? C.G.